

Newsroom

June 21, 2010

Georgia Southern University

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Georgia Southern University

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Georgia Southern University Professor Helping Lead Lyme Disease Research

JUNE 21, 2010



The number of reported Lyme disease cases is rising steadily in the northern United States, causing concern about the potentially devastating effects of the illness. Meanwhile, the number of confirmed cases is much lower in the South, despite its year-round abundance of ticks due to the warm climate.

While debate continues over whether the South truly has a much lower rate of Lyme disease, or if the South's number of cases is greatly underreported, Georgia Southern University professor Lorenza Beati is helping lead research to learn more about the species of tick that transmits Lyme disease.

Beati and a group of Georgia Southern biology and public health students are partnering with teams from five other universities in the U.S. and one in Canada to study the black-legged tick. Lyme disease is transmitted through the bite of a tick carrying the disease, typically from the tick biting an infected animal.

"We are trying to test alternative hypotheses to explain why this geographic difference is so marked," said Beati, a professor at Georgia Southern University's Institute of Arthropodology and Parasitology (IAP). The IAP houses the U.S. National Tick Collection, the world's largest tick collection with more than one million specimens on long-term loan from

the Smithsonian Institution.

"One hypothesis circulating for many years is that the South doesn't have much Lyme disease because ticks here often feed on lizards, which supposedly aren't good reservoirs for the disease," Beati added.

The four-year, \$2.5 million study is funded by a National Science Foundation grant. Each participating university brings a different specialty to the project, with Beati leading the research on the genetic composition of black-legged ticks.

"I'm in charge of studying the genetics of the ticks to see if possibly they are a genetically different population that behave differently or feed on different animals or have different attributes that make them more or less able to transmit diseases," Beati said.

The Georgia Southern team conducted its initial research at the Department of Energy's Savannah River Site near Aiken, S.C., and plans to set up two more field research sites closer to the Statesboro campus. Beati and the students will collect ticks from lizards, rodents and mammals as well as ticks found in vegetation, since they may tell a different story than the ones pulled from the animals.

Georgia Southern and the other five universities – Michigan State University, the University of Tennessee, the University of Rhode Island, Hofstra University and the University of Montreal – will compile a centralized database of their research results. Beati said that research findings will be published throughout the project, which is funded through the end of 2013.

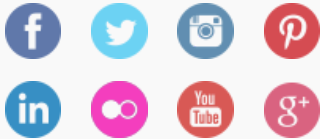
"I think we got this grant because there is such a diversity of researchers collaborating on the same project. It is a large group effort where we put together a lot of strengths and expertise," Beati said.

Georgia Southern University, a Carnegie Doctoral/Research University, offers 115 degree programs serving 19,000 students. Through eight colleges, the University offers bachelors, masters and doctoral degree programs built on more than a century of academic achievement. The University, one of Georgia's largest, is a top choice of Georgia's HOPE scholars and is recognized for its student-centered approach to education.

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"O Christmas Tree, O Christmas Tree..." 🎄🎵#TBT to circa 1964, when a tree in front of the Williams Center was decorated for the holidays.



16h

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